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Soviets seem to be closing the smoking gap with U.S.

By MICHAEL PARKS

Moscow—To the growing concern of Soviet medical authorities, Russians are smoking more now and enjoying it more.

Despite a concerted anti-smoking campaign in Soviet schools over the last six years and new bans on smoking in many public places, cigarette consumption has grown four times as rapidly as the population since 1970

The Soviet Union's domestic cigarette production came to about 375 billion last year—enough for everyone over 14 years old to smoke 100 packs a year, even without Moscow's sizable imports from Bulgaria, Cuba, the United States and Yugoslavia.

Cigarette production here has risen nearly 16 per cent since 1970 while the population has grown less than 4 per cent.

Since 1959, Soviet cigarette consumption has risen almost 75 per cent—a statistic that led one Soviet cancer specialist to suggest there is "some sort of national death wish."

Soviet health authorities are particularly alarmed by the apparent failure of their program to dissuade students and other young people from smoking.

A survey of Soviet smoking habits published by *Krokodil*, the satirical Soviet weekly newspaper, said that smoking has become increasingly fashionable and popular among women and young people.

Until 5 years ago, only 10 to 12 per cent of Moscow women smoked, according to Leonid V Orlovsky, a senior researcher at the Central Institute for Scientific Research in Health Education. Now the estimate is 30 to 35 per cent.

The percentage of Moscow men who smoke has risen from 63 to an estimated 80 per cent, according to other studies.

Mr Orlovsky has found in recent surveys of schoolchildren that more are beginning to smoke at younger ages, a trend almost as true of girls as of boys now.

The conclusion of Soviet researchers is that the intensive anti-smoking campaign begun in the country's schools has proved ineffective.

This campaign used cartoons, posters, booklets, films, television discussions and special study programs to emphasize the dangers of smoking.

One of the films opens with a shot of two 14-year-old boys smoking on a park bench. Then it zooms in on a long-haired, guitar-playing youth singing a jingle about how cool and adult it is to smoke. Then it moves to some white-aproned women at a cigarette factory telling an interviewer that they do not consider smoking harmful.

Suddenly an authoritative male narrator interjects:

"The nicotine from five cigarettes can kill a rabbit. The nicotine from 100 cigarettes can kill a horse. What about man?"

Within a few minutes, viewers hear that a smoker is 13 times as likely to get cancer or stomach ulcers as a nonsmoker, that he is more likely to suffer from a variety of other diseases as well.

But this and similar films are undercut, *Krokodil* complained, by the example set by teachers, doctors and nurses, who rank among the heaviest smokers in the Soviet Union.

Some anti-smoking campaigners have called recently for the government to ban smoking in all public places, such as Poland did last fall.

Smoking is now forbidden in subways, buses, most theaters and lobbies, cafeterias, many factories and shops and, by recent order, on all airplane flights of three hours or less.

But these prohibitions are widely ignored. A *Krokodil* cartoon shows a group of boys smoking near the restroom of their school while smoke clouds pour out of the teachers' room down the hall. The caption reads: "Our teachers are just like children."

Krokodil noted that a "no smoking" sign hangs in its office—"but you cannot see it for the smoke."

There have been other proposals that the government reduce cigarette production and raise prices to discourage smoking as it has done with vodka in an effort to curb alcoholism.

Higher-priced brands have been introduced, but like new products on the American market they appear to have only increased total sales, which came to more than $5 billion last year, according to preliminary figures.

Rough-cut Primas, the cheapest Soviet cigarettes, still sell for 14 kopecks (20 cents) a pack. The more popular Rossiskiye or Stolichnye cost 40 kopecks (57 cents), and some smokers pay 80 kopecks ($1 14) for Yava longs.

Many of the country's small cigarette stands are often out of the 6 or 7 the 10 brands they carry.

Krokodil, which announced in its special issue that it was "throwing"—the Russian expression for giving up—cigarettes, attacked the lack of concern here about the increase in smoking in an unusual criticism of Soviet authorities It singled out health authorities for particular criticism, saying that they had failed to emphasize the dangers involved.

Soviet doctors have written too timidly, quoting findings made abroad on smoking's harmful effects (a typical Soviet practice of citing bad examples in the West in dealing with domestic problems), according to *Krokodil*.

"In a word, all these terrors take place somewhere in far-off lands or the countries of capitalism," *Krokodil* said, "and our smoker is left with the brave hope that this does not affect him personally."

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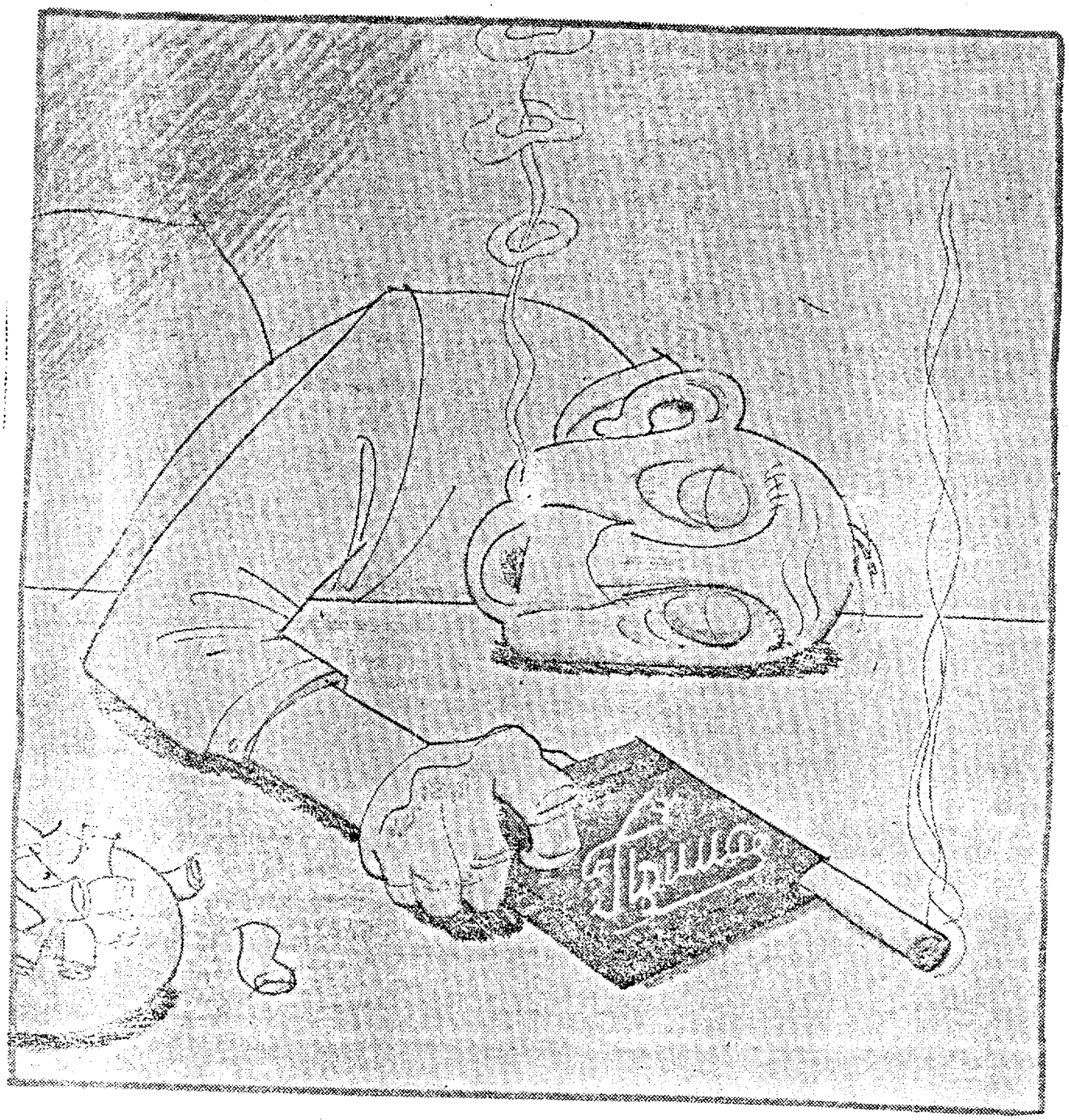

The front cover of Krokodil